

Utah County/B1-4,8
Local, Regional/B1-12
Weather/B2

Utah County

Friday, December 11, 1987

Flow from Deer Creek cut for fear of water shortage

By Michael Morris

Deseret News staff writer

PROVO — Concerns over a possible water shortage next year have prompted the Provo River Water Users Association to reduce water flow from Deer Creek Reservoir into Provo River — a decision fishermen say could devastate the river's fishery.

Approximately 60 cubic feet per second of water is being released from the reservoir, the lowest amount in years. Rick Cox, water users association assistant superintendent, said the flow likely would be reduced Friday morning by about 10 cfs.

Provo River fishery could be devastated, critics say

"We would be derelict if we didn't try to conserve water," he said. Cox said snowpack areas that feed Provo River and Deer Creek are only 25 percent of average. Officials won't feel comfortable until snowpack is at 100 percent of average.

Water flow into the reservoir from the Weber and Duchesne rivers also is significantly below average. "We're just getting a trickle from those sources," he said.

The water users association has been meeting with officials from the state Division of Wildlife Resources to

discuss flow reductions. Wildlife resources officials were expected Friday morning to join Cox and other water officials at Deer Creek dam to discuss the reductions.

"We're really trying to work with the Division of Water Resources. We don't want to hurt anything," Cox said. "We just don't want to waste water at this point in the season if it looks like we're going to have a dry winter."

Cox said lower Provo River water users have only water rights to 15 cubic feet per second, while the Metropolitan Water District of Salt Lake City owns 61 percent

of water in Deer Creek Reservoir.

Because Friday's flow reduction will be small, Cox said, "It's really not as drastic as everyone's putting it up to be."

Fishermen, however, are calling the decision premature and say officials should wait on the weather a little longer. They say if flows are reduced too much, damage to the fishery in the lower Provo River could be irreparable.

"It's maybe a little premature, that's what I think," said Charlie Thompson, regional fisheries manager for the Division of Wildlife Resources. "It doesn't make

Please see RIVER on B2

RIVER

Continued from B1

sense taking water out, killing fish and then having a flood next spring."

Thompson said he realizes, however, that water flow into the reservoir is at one of its lowest levels in years.

"They're caught in a hard place, too," he said of the water users association. "We're going to have to give up something."

Legally, Thompson said, the Division of Wildlife Resources can do nothing to stop the flow reduction, but is trying to convince the water users association to keep reductions to a minimum.

"Those people control water rights on the river. They can shut it off or run it however they want," he said. "There's no legal way we can do anything."

Because the lower Provo River

isn't stocked with fish, the river's fish-feeding habitat must be protected so fish can feed and reproduce, said Jesse Higgins, former president of the Utah Fly Rodders fishing club. He said that if flows are reduced to half the current level the fishery could be devastated.

"The larger fish will be the first ones to go," Higgins said. "Chances are, with that low of a flow, the river couldn't sustain reproducing fish."

Cox said additional flow reductions are possible, but flows could be increased to normal levels depending on precipitation.

Greg Bullock, president of the Stonefly Society in Salt Lake City, said any significant reductions in flows would be detrimental. He said reductions will expose and dry up underwater weed beds that serve as insect habitats and feeding areas for fish.

"Once you impact insect life, you hurt the fishery all around," he said. "You won't see the fish hatches next

summer you used to see. It ends up creating a domino effect and affects the whole wildlife chain."

Bullock said officials should wait another month to see whether the weather changes. A month of lower flows, he said, could set back for years work by the Division of Wildlife Resources to improve Provo River fishing.

"My opinion is they're panicky, and it is way too soon to do anything like this. I don't think they're looking at our situation as fishermen."

Cox said the river picks up 50 cfs of water between Deer Creek Reservoir and the Murdock Diversion Dam from streams feeding the river. The flows from those streams will help mitigate the effect of reductions from the reservoir, he said.

"If we can possibly release water, we do," Cox said. "We're on the same side (as the Division of Wildlife Resources). We want to provide (culinary) water, while mitigating environmental impacts."

Worried officials reduce flow from reservoir to all-time low

By Michael Morris 12-13-87
Deseret News staff writer

PROVO — Water flow from Deer Creek Reservoir into Provo River was reduced to an all-time low Friday as concerns about low snowpack and possible water shortages next year have prompted officials to begin conserving water.

Provo River Water Users Association directors reduced flow to the river from 60 cubic feet per second to 40 cfs while Division of Wildlife Resources officials monitored the reduction's effect on the river level. An additional 30 cfs flowing from the reservoir to the Salt Lake City aqueduct was not reduced.

Charlie Thompson, wildlife division regional fisheries manager, said the reductions are premature and expressed concern about the effect they could have on fish and other river wildlife. The reductions, however, had less of an impact on the river level than officials originally feared.

Rick Cox, water users' association assistant superintendent, ordered flows reduced by 10 cfs Friday morning. Several hours later officials determined the river level had decreased only about one inch. A subsequent reduction was ordered in the afternoon, with a similar reduction expected.

Cox said the river picks up about 50 cubic feet per second of water between Deer Creek Reservoir and the Murdock Diversion Dam from small streams feeding the river. The flows from those streams will help mitigate the effect of reductions from the reservoir, he said.

Because the lower Provo River isn't stocked with fish, fishermen and environmentalists are encouraging the water users association not to endanger the river's fish-feeding habitat. Thompson said fish are spawning, and eggs are being laid close to the river's banks.

"If we drop it very low, we could end up icing up some of those areas," he said. Members of local fly fishing clubs said significant reductions will expose and dry up underwater weed beds that serve as insect habitats and feeding areas for fish.

"We're hoping we can reach a level that does not impact river fishing and still saves some water," Thompson said. "It's taken us 12 years to build up fishing to where we are now."

Cox said additional reductions are possible, but that flows could just as easily be increased when precipita-



PHOTOGRAPHY/ MIKE MORRIS

Division of Wildlife officials Charlie Thompson, with glasses, and Mark Holden check effects of flow cuts on Provo River.

tion reaches normal levels. Because fish are laying eggs now, he said, it's better to start flow reductions to force fish into deeper water.

"The earlier, the better. If we wait until February and eggs have been laid in four or five inches of water and then we end up dropping the level six inches, you've lost everything."

Harold Ford, Deer Creek Dam's chief operator, said Friday's flow into Provo River is the lowest it has been in the 28 years he has worked at the dam. He said the reservoir water has often been half its current level, but that officials weren't concerned because of the amount of nearby snowpack.

Snowpack areas that feed Provo River and Deer Creek are only 25 percent of average. Cox said Offi-

cials won't feel comfortable until snowpack is at 100 percent of average. Water flow into the reservoir from the Weber and Duchesne rivers also is significantly below average.

Ford said the reduced flows are forcing officials to shut down power generators powered by water from the reservoir. "We've got one on, but if we go any lower we'll have to shut it off, too."

He said the Bureau of Reclamation uses money generated from electricity sales to pay off the project.

Ford said many people take for granted that half the year's snowpack falls before the end of the year, "but that's not always the case. I don't think anybody should panic. But I can see both sides of the issue."

Utah County/B1-3, 5; E1
Local, Regional/B1-12
Weather/B2

Utah County

Deer Creek flow increased to save fish

By Michael Morris
and Steve Fidel
Deseret News staff writers

15 Dec '87

But water users fear shortage next year

PROVO — Despite concern by water users that Deer Creek Reservoir may not fill next year, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has ordered that the flow from Deer Creek Dam be increased to protect fish in the Provo River.

The Provo River Water Users Association had ordered the flow reduced Friday from 60 to 40 cubic feet per second because of concerns about low snow pack and possible water shortages next year.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources opposed the move because of the effect it could have on Provo River fish — but officials said they had no legal means of stopping the action.

However, the Bureau of Reclamation produced a document saying it had the right to 20,000 acre-feet of Central Utah

Project water stored in the reservoir to maintain a flow of not less than 100 cfs in the river, said bureau public affairs officer Barry Wirth.

"The water in question that supports the 100 cfs flow is CUP water, not Provo River Water Users Association water," Wirth said. "When we realized the situation (last week), we brought up the environmental document that required the 100 cfs. We did what we felt we had to do because the National Environmental Protection Act document has some very specific language in it."

Rather than increase the flows from 40 to 100 cfs all at once, the increases were made gradually to prevent a gush of water from washing away wildlife habitat and stirring up the stream bed, Wirth said.

Release levels from Deer Creek were increased from 40 to 70 cfs Saturday, and reached the full 100 cfs late Monday.

"To the best of my knowledge (the sportsmen) are happy that it's coming back up to where everybody perceives it should be," Wirth said. "They seemed to be pleased with the decision."

But water users are not happy. In light of a low snow pack and a possible water shortage next year, maintaining such a high flow is unwise, said water users superintendent Jack Gardner. At the current rate of flow, he said, the 20,000 acre feet of CUP water will have drained into Utah Lake in 100 days.

"Then they won't have any water. It's a total waste of water at a time when it's needed," Gardner said.

Last year, he said, officials waited until January before they began storing water in Deer Creek, and "it just barely filled." But last November, only 36,000 acre feet of water was needed to fill the reservoir.

Twice that amount was needed as of last month, Gardner said, and little precipitation has fallen since then.

"That tells me there's only one thing to do: Store every drop of water wherever you can find it," he said. "You can't look at it any other way. I can't say let's look down the road and everything will be all right. Then, it's too late."

Rick Cox, assistant superintendent of the water users association, said his group has rights to only 15 cfs, while the Metropolitan Water District of Salt Lake City owns 61 percent of Deer Creek Reservoir water. Besides the flow into the Provo River, an additional 30 cfs flows into the Salt Lake City aqueduct.

Because the river picks up about 50 cfs of water from streams feeding the river between the reservoir and the Murdock Diversion Dam down stream, Gardner said, a flow of 15-20 cfs from the reservoir is sufficient. He said he realizes, however, that

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Please see RIVER on B2

